

Message Text

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12

ACTION EA-14

INFO OCT-01 ADP-00 CIAE-00 DODE-00 PM-09 H-02 INR-10 L-03

NSAE-00 NSC-10 PA-03 RSC-01 PRS-01 SS-15 USIA-12 IO-12

RSR-01 /094 W

----- 108781

R 190505 Z MAY 73

FM AMEMBASSY SAIGON

TO SECSTATE WASHDC 1869

INFO AMEMBASSY BANGKOK

AMCONSUL BIEN HOA

AMCONSUL CAN THO

CINCPAC

AMCONSUL DANANG

AMCONSUL NHA TRANG

USDEL JEC PARIS

AMEMBASSY PHNOM PENH

AMEMBASSY VIENTIANE

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E. O. 11652: N/ A

TAGS: PINT VS

SUBJECT: UNIFIED CELEBRATION OF BUDDHA' S BIRTHDAY IN SAIGON

CINCPAC FOR POLAD

REF: SAIGON 8581, ITEM I(E)

1. THE UNIFIED CELEBRATION OF BUDDHA' S BIRTHDAY BY AN QUANG, QUOC TU, AND OTHER SMALLER BUDDHIST GROUPS WENT OFF AS SCHEDULED, HIGHLIGHTED BY A MAJOR CEREMONY IN THE MORNING OF MAY 17 AT NGA BAY SQUARE IN SAIGON BORDERING ON CHOLON. THERE WERE JOINTLY SPONSORED PARADED IN SAIGON IN THE EVENINGS OF MAY 15 AND 16, AND PAGODAS ALSO HELD THEIR OWN SEPARATE CEREMONIES. IT WAS ANNOUNCED THAT AN QUANG AND QUOC TU EACH CONTRIBUTED ONE MILLION PIASTERS TO THE COMMON EFFORT.

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THERE WAS PROBABLY A GOVERNMENT CONTRIBUTION AS WELL, AT LEAST FOR THE CONSTRUCTION OF THE LARGE TEMPORARY MONUMENT AT THE SITE OF THE MAIN SAIGON CEREMONY AND FOR LESSER STRUCTURES THROUGHOUT THE COUNTRY.

2. SAIGON NEWSPAPERS GAVE HEAVY COVERAGE TO THESE EVENTS, BOTH BEFORE AND AFTER THE MAIN CEREMONY. GVN TELEVISION CARRIED A SPECIAL PROGRAM IN THE EVENING MAY 17 FEATURING HISTORICAL FACTS ABOUT BUDDHISM. THE MORNING RADIO MAY 18 HAD A LENGTHY REPORT ON THE CELEBRATIONS.

3. REPORTS FROM CONGENS AFFIRM THAT LARGE CELEBRATIONS OCCURRED IN VARIOUS CITIES, ESPECIALLY IN DANANG WHERE AN QUANG DID THE ORGANIZING (SEE SAIGON 8695).

4. COMMENT: THE JOINT CEREMONY IS SIGNIFICANT AS A FIRST STEP TOWARD POSSIBLE UNIT OF THE TWO MAIN BUDDHIST FACTIONS, WHICH SPLIT IN 1966 AND HAVE NOT HELD A COMMON CELEBRATION OF BUDDHA'S BIRTHDAY SINCE 1964. THE FACT THAT AN QUANG AND QUOC TU WERE ABLE TO SHOW EVEN THIS DEGREE OF COOPERATION IS A NEW DEPARTURE FOR BOTH. HOWEVER, THE MERGING OF THE TWO ORGANIZATIONS WILL REQUIRE MUCH TICKLISH BARGAINING AND WILL CERTAINLY NOT BE ACHIEVED FOR SOME TIME, IF AT ALL. FOR EXAMPLE, THE AN QUANG NEGOTIATORS WILL HAVE TO GUARD THEIR FLANK CONSTANTLY AGAINST THE AN QUANG MILITANTS WHO SUSPECT A "SELLOUT" TO THE GOVERNMENT. IT IS SAID THAT THE INFLUENTIAL AN QUANG LEADER VENERABLE TRI QUANG HAS ADDED HIS VOICE TO THESE MILITANT RANKS, ALTHOUGH HIS PUBLIC POSTURE REMAINS AS ENIGMATIC AS EVER. ONE SAIGON DAILY MAY 18 HEADLINED THAT BOTH TRI QUANG AND VENERABLE TAM GIAC, THE QUOC TU LEADER, WERE NOT AT THE MAIN CEREMONY. (THIS IS PERHAPS NOT SURPRISING IN EITHER CASE. TRI QUANG SELDOM APPEARS IN PUBLIC THESE DAYS, AND TAM GIAC HAS JUST RECOVERED FROM AN ILLNESS.) ANOTHER PAPER THE SAME DAY NOTED, HOWEVER, THAT VENERABLE HUYEN QUANG OF AN QUANG AND VENERABLE TAM CHAU, FORMER LEADER OF QUOC TU, HELD PRIVATE DISCUSSIONS MAY 16 AT THE AN QUANG PAGODA AIMED AT EVENTUAL UNITY.

WHITEHOUSE

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